

BRACEBRIDGE HALL.*

THE public appears often an ungenerous, at all times a suspicious patron, warm as a child in the first burst of its enthusiasm, and still displaying its infantine temper in its capricious mode of treating old favourites. But after all, its ungraciousness is more in semblance than in reality—its stock of favour and compliment has been already exhausted—and, too sincere to keep a reserve of admiration, it feels itself quite unable to meet a renewed demand. Hence, if the early publications of an author have met with eminent success, his later ones are sure to meet with rebuffs *in seeming*. The reader cannot abandon himself to admiration exclusively: comparisons are forced on him; and if he have too much good nature to set about comparing the author with his brethren, he cannot avoid comparing him with himself—his present with his past productions. This is not likely to be in favour of the latter, since predilection for old favourites is only to be overcome by a very palpable degree of improvement.

If subsequent publications meet with such a reception from the mere reader, what must they expect from the critic? from him, who cannot utter his *dicta* in ejaculations and monosyllables, but must lay down his *pros* and *cons* at length in dreadful legibility. From him the twice-told tale of unqualified admiration will not be suffered—"he is nothing, if not critical," and the new qualities put forth by the authors in review, must be the burden of his strain. Unfortunately, however, as a writer proceeds, he develops more defects than beauties—the defects thicken upon us, as he grows more confident and careless—while the beauties get threadbare by degrees, and become trite and mawkish by being harped upon. Hence criticism often seems to indulge in ungenerous "after-thought," and to recall spitefully the meed of praise it formerly bestowed, while, in truth, it is but censorious from necessity, and "severe from too much love."

Besides, we may take liberties with an old and established friend, and abuse him good-naturedly to his face, while we leave our esteem and good opinion of him unspoken—as sentiments he might safely reckon upon, though never a word concerning them were uttered. After this, without mentioning the pleasure received in the perusal of "Bracebridge Hall," we will come at once to the point, and say, that we consider it much inferior to the "Sketch Book." A kind of languor prevails through the volumes, amidst which we in vain look for the spirit of their predecessors. The pictures, especially the wild scenes of America, are wrought with more pain, but by no means with the felicity of former stories. Dolph Heyliger is but a clumsy shadow of Rip Van Winkle, and the scenes of the latter were given with a taste and keeping, that seem to have escaped the author in the more laboured descriptions of the former. The Storm-Ship is however very well told; there is a curious and most original intermixture of the ludicrous and the terrible in those old Dutch superstitions. We know not a more puzzling character in romance than a Dutch ghost; and had we encountered one in the pages of Radcliffe, we certainly should not know what to have

* Bracebridge Hall: by Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. 2 vols. 8vo.

thought. Geoffrey is extremely happy in the delineation of these non-descripts, and, however our friend may impugn the originality of Rip Van Winkle, the author has Dutchified it in most admirable style.

The opening of "Bracebridge Hall" introduces us to a family party, which we before had the pleasure of meeting in the "Sketch Book." The cause and end of their meeting is a wedding, about to take place between "the fair Julia" and "the Captain." This affords the author an opportunity of sketching various characters; and an accident that conveniently befalls the heroine, enables him to dwell upon the matter till the two volumes are completed. The chief character is the squire himself, a good-humoured and agreeable old gentleman, whom Geoffrey meant seemingly to depict as an original. But in this he has overshot the mark, and has made him more of the cloistered pedant than the country squire. He is tiresomely conversant with old volumes; has taken a strange fancy to falconry; and the other peculiarities with which he is marked, are too common-place to shed any novelty or interest upon the character. Lady Lillycraft is the best drawn and the most original, though, we much fear, such beings are exceedingly rare. Master Simon is humorous enough, a second Will Wimble, but rather more starched than his prototype. The defeat which he and the General suffer, from the radical during the May sports, is well sketched. The bride and bridegroom are true to nature, being, like all people in their situation, sufficiently insipid. But our heaviest censure must fall on Ready-Money Jack: this personage is a living character, of the name of Tibbets, very well known by the nickname here bestowed on him. He is a resident in Islington, and is no doubt the gay, frank, bold, ready-monied man represented. But, to make use of a hackneyed term, it is too *cockneyish* to sketch a character from a suburb of the metropolis, and give it forth as a sample of the rural John Bull. The incongruity is quite evident, and a similar defect is visible through all the characters: the squire is a pedant, the general a militia-man, the yeoman a cockney. Yet with all this, the work is exceedingly well written, and entertaining: it is a pity that the author did not add to its intrinsic talent, that truth to nature, which a little time and observation might have enabled him to do. Perhaps this was not his design—perhaps hurry prevented him; but it is necessary to mark strongly the want of this truth, as the work may be considered in other countries to represent a faithful picture of our country life and manners.

But these objections are applicable merely to the vehicle; the matter contained is for the most part excellent. The "Stout Gentleman" is a capital quiz, and the pictures of the Schoolmaster and his Assistant are faithfully sketched. The Spanish tale is pretty, but rather in the ordinary track of romance-writing. "Annette Delarbre" is beautifully told. But Mr. Crayon must pardon "certain writers in Magazines" (as he terms a friend or two of ours with precise civility) for reiterating the charge, that his best tales are not original. Had not the story of "Hina" previously existed, we should indeed want words to express our admiration for "Annette Delarbre." But our denying the credit of the original thought, by no means interferes with the just tribute of praise due to the raising of the superstructure. The "Rookery" is a very amusing paper, but as it is one likely to be well-

known and quoted, we shall choose for our extracts some portions of "The Storm-Ship."

"In the golden age of the province of the New Netherlands, when it was under the sway of Wouter Van Twiller, otherwise called the Doubter, the people of the Manhattoes* were alarmed one sultry afternoon, just about the time of the summer solstice, by a tremendous storm of thunder and lightning. The rain descended in such torrents as absolutely to spatter up and smoke along the ground. It seemed as if the thunder rattled and rolled over the very roofs of the houses: the lightning was seen to play about the church of St. Nicholas, and to strive three times in vain to strike its weathercock. Garret Van Horne's new chimney was split almost from top to bottom; and Doffue Mildeberger was struck speechless from his bald-faced mare, just as he was riding into town. In a word, it was one of those unparalleled storms that only happen once within the memory of that venerable personage, known in all towns by the appellation of 'the oldest inhabitant.'

"Great was the terror of the good old women of the Manhattoes. They gathered their children together, and took refuge in the cellars, after having hung a shoe on the iron point of every bed-post, lest it should attract the lightning. At length the storm abated, the thunder sunk into a growl, and the setting sun, breaking from under the fringed borders of the clouds, made the broad bosom of the bay to gleam like a sea of molten gold. The word was given from the fort that a ship was standing up the bay."

* * * * *

"In the mean time the ship became more distinct to the naked eye: she was a stout, round, Dutch-built vessel, with high bow and poop, and bearing Dutch colours. The evening sun gilded her bellying canvass, as she came riding over the long-waving billows. The sentinel, who had given notice of her approach, declared, that he first got sight of her when she was in the centre of the bay; and that she broke suddenly on his sight just as if she had come out of the bosom of the black thunder-cloud. The bystanders looked at Hans Van Pelt, to see what he would say to this report: Hans Van Pelt screwed his mouth closer together, and said nothing; upon which some shook their heads, and others shrugged their shoulders.

"The ship was now repeatedly hailed, but made no reply, and, passing by the fort, stood on, up the Hudson. A gun was brought to bear on her, and with some difficulty, loaded and fired by Hans Van Pelt, the garrison not being expert in artillery. The shot seemed absolutely to pass through the ship, and to skip along the water on the other side, but no notice was taken of it!—What was strange, she had all her sails set, and sailed right against wind and tide, which were both down the river. Upon this Hans Van Pelt, who was likewise harbour-master, ordered his boat, and set off to board her, but after rowing two or three hours he returned without success; sometimes he would get within one or two hundred yards of her, and then, in a twinkling, she would be half a mile off. Some said it was because his oars'-men, who were rather palsy and short-winded, stopped every now and then to take breath, and spit on their hands; but this it is probable was a mere scandal. He got near enough, however, to see the crew, who were all dressed in the Dutch style, the officers in doublets and high hats and feathers: not a word was spoken by any one on board;—they stood as motionless as so many statues, and the ship seemed as if left to her own government. Thus she kept on, away up the river, lessening and lessening in the evening sunshine, until she faded from sight, like a little white cloud melting away in the summer sky."

* * * * *

"Messengers were despatched to different places on the river; but they returned without any tidings—the ship had made no port. Day after day and week after week elapsed, but she never returned down the Hudson. As,

* New-York.

however, the Council seemed solicitous for intelligence, they had it in abundance. The captains of the sloops seldom arrived without bringing some report of having seen the strange ship at different parts of the river ; sometimes near the Pallisadoes, sometimes off Croton Point, and sometimes in the highlands ; but she never was reported as having been seen above the highlands. The crews of the sloops, it is true, generally differed among themselves in their accounts of this apparition ; but that may have arisen from the uncertain situations in which they saw her. Sometimes it was by the flashes of the thunder-storm lighting up a pitchy night, and giving glimpses of her careering across Tappaan Zee, or the wide waste of Haverstraw Bay. A tone moment she would appear close upon them, as if likely to run them down, and would throw them into great bustle and alarm ; but the next flash would shew her far off, always sailing against the wind. Sometimes, in quiet moonlight night, she would be seen under some high bluff of the highlands, all in deep shadow, excepting her top-sails glittering in the moon-beams ; by the time, however, that the voyagers would reach the place, there would be no ship to be seen : and when they had passed on for some distance, and looked back, behold ! there she was again, with her top-sails in the moonshine !—Her appearance was always just after, or just before, or just in the midst of unruly weather ; and she was known by all the skippers and voyagers of the Hudson by the name of ‘ the Storm-Ship.’ ”

There is one observation we must not omit ; it is, that the style of the work under review is not so pure and select as that of the “ Sketch Book.” We could multiply instances—the frequent use of the word *get*, of *bloody* as a verb, &c. We press this on the author’s attention, not only for his own sake, but for that of literature in general, which his former work has so much benefited. Before the appearance of the “ Sketch Book,” all writers seem to have been either above or below considerations about style, diction, and such things. Poetry had just succeeded, not only in throwing off its trammels, but was endeavouring to rid itself even of a decorous garb. Prose had begun to follow the example ; and the lighter departments of literature, especially those of criticism and essay-writing, were abandoning rapidly all qualities of purity or elegance, whilst they sought novelty in singularity, and strength in abruptness. The success of the “ Sketch Book” was a reproof to some random writers, of talents at least equal to those of its author, but whose publications were lying on the shelf. The beneficial consequences of this practical lesson appear to us manifest in the periodical literature of the day ; which, in such a light-reading age as the present, must be of paramount importance, being the first to lead the way in deterioration or improvement. The essays of the “ Sketch Book” and “ Bracebrige Hall” we reckon under the class of periodical literature, and indeed they answer the description much better than most articles of Magazine and Review. Therefore whatever progress the author makes in future, and we have no doubt it will be of improvement, he should at least look to preserve that peculiar species of excellency to which he is certainly most indebted for the rise of his fame.